Trans-Lake Washington Project EIS Methodology Report – 6/10/02

Vegetation and Wildlife

Guiding Plans and Policies

- Endangered Species Act
- Critical/sensitive areas ordinances (including applicable tree retention regulations) for Seattle, Medina, Hunts Point, Yarrow Point, Clyde Hill, Kirkland, Bellevue, and Redmond
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) regulations
- WSDOT Environmental Procedures Manual, Section 436, July 2001.
- The Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act
- Shoreline Management Act and applicable local Shoreline Master Programs
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act

Data Needs and Sources

- Recent (November 2000 or later) aerial photographs overlaid with major project components. The project team will provide aerial photographs. Plots from the GIS system are acceptable.
- Recent (within 6 months) Priority Habitat and Species (PHS) data from WDFW.
- Recent (within 6 months) information on rare habitats and species from the Department of Natural Resources Washington Natural Heritage Program (WNHP).
- Recent (within 6 months) information on threatened and endangered wildlife from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service.
- Current adopted Comprehensive Plans and Critical Areas Ordinances (CAOs) for the following jurisdictions: Seattle, Medina, Hunts Point, Yarrow Point, Clyde Hill, Kirkland, Bellevue, and Redmond. The environmental team currently has a copy of each jurisdiction's plans. Comprehensive plans and CAO amendments for 2001 will be reviewed to ensure that the most current information is being analyzed. It is assumed that any amendments and updates will be provided upon request by the planning departments of the identified cities and King County, or will be available on the internet.
- This analysis will be based in part on a review of the project impacts reported in other environmental discipline analyses prepared for the Trans-Lake Washington Project.

Consequently, portions of this analysis cannot be completed until the impacts and mitigation for other disciplines have been identified. Key disciplines for review include transportation, wetlands, noise and vibration, land use, water resources, and fisheries.

Proposed Coordination with Agencies

Agencies and organizations will be contacted via telephone or e-mail for additional information on wildlife and rare plants in study area. Those agencies will include:

- WDFW, Urban Wildlife Biologist (Patricia Thompson)
- King County, Urban Wildlife Biologist (Kate Stenberg)
- Washington Native Plant Society, Local Chapter
- Washington Park Arboretum, Staff Biologist
- Natural Resources or Planning Department staff from Seattle, Medina, Hunts Point, Yarrow Point, Clyde Hill, Kirkland, Bellevue, and Redmond
- Tribal Staff
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Proposed Coordination with Team, WSDOT, and Sound Transit

To assess vegetation and wildlife impacts, close coordination will be required with the team leads of the following discipline studies:

- Transportation – need to know existing and anticipated traffic levels, facilities; and safety impacts
- Noise and Vibration – need to know existing and anticipated noise levels
- Water Resources – need to know any anticipated changes in water quality
- Wetlands – need to know wetland fill impacts and impacts on wetland function (including shoreline areas / functions)
- Fisheries – need to know any changes in fish distribution and abundance (to assess impacts on wildlife food sources)
- Land Use – need to know predicted land use changes that would affect open space and habitat

The vegetation / wildlife task leader will work with the leaders of those studies to obtain preliminary assessment of anticipated impacts, and will incorporate those early impact assessments into the vegetation and wildlife impact assessment. Upon completion of the other analyses, the vegetation and wildlife analysis will be modified as necessary to reflect the final findings of those other analyses.

Study Area

The analysis will extend up to 1 mile from the project corridor. Impact analysis will focus on those areas within 1/4 to 1/2 mile of the proposed alternatives. This will allow for documentation of direct impacts. For particularly sensitive wildlife species, such as nesting/foraging bald eagles, the study area will include all areas within 1 mile of the proposed alternatives.

Affected Environment Methodology

The affected environment section will describe the following:

- The distribution and acreage of existing vegetation/cover types and a description of typical wildlife species
- The presence of habitats and species protected under city and county plans and CAOs
- The presence of WDFW priority habitats and species and WNHP habitats and species
- The presence of federal or state-listed or proposed threatened or endangered terrestrial plants and animals
- Presence of ESA-listed critical habitat

Maps will be prepared to show the distribution of cover types. Vegetation/cover types will be classified based on field reconnaissance and review of aerial photographs. Approximate acreage for each existing vegetation/cover type will be determined using GIS. The presence of species of particular interest (i.e., ESA-listed species, priority species, etc. as designated in the bullets above) and their habitats will be based on field reconnaissance and information obtained from agencies and organizations, and will be included in the GIS database.

Environmental Consequences Analysis Methodology

The environmental consequences analysis will assess potential direct and construction effects of the proposed alternatives and their major elements on vegetation/cover types, habitats, and species protected under city plans and CAOs; WDFW priority habitats and species; WNHP habitats and species; terrestrial plants and animals listed or proposed for listing under the federal ESA; and state-listed or proposed terrestrial plants and animals. Impact assessment will be aided by field reconnaissance, GIS analysis, review of acquired PHS data and other information, and conversations with agency staff.

Direct Impacts

Direct impacts will be analyzed in terms of the alteration of vegetation/cover types and sensitive habitats. Changes in habitat connectivity and potential for increased wildlife mortality will also be discussed. Approximate acreage of affected vegetation/cover types will be determined using GIS.

Construction Impacts

Short-term construction impacts will be analyzed qualitatively in terms of the potential for the displacement of wildlife due to noise and other construction-related disturbances.

Mitigation Measure Methodology

The mitigation discussion will identify measures to avoid or minimize the identified vegetation and wildlife impacts. Consultation with agency staff will assist in the identification of reasonable and acceptable mitigation measures. Mitigation for vegetation and wildlife impacts, such as those resulting from vegetation clearing and increased traffic and noise, will be developed in conjunction with the related environmental sections. Opportunities to restore or improve habitat connectivity will be discussed as appropriate.

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